

MUSEUM THEATRE GUIDE

WESTWARD INTO KENTUCKY: THE JOURNAL OF DANIEL TRABUE

OVERVIEW

Museum theatre characters bring exhibit themes to life through dramatic performances that incorporate historical and universal themes. In this presentation, a costumed actor positioned in Area C, “Frontier Kentucky,” performs an eight-minute monologue based on the memoir of Daniel Trabue, then invites questions from the audience.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Topics

- Frontier
- Indians
- Indian wars and treaties

Academic expectations

- Historical Perspective
- Culture and Society
- Analysis of forms

BACKGROUND

History

The character of Daniel Trabue was inspired by an autobiographical account penned by a sixty-five-year-old man living in Adair County, Kentucky, in 1827. Born in Virginia, Trabue first came to Kentucky in 1775 at age seventeen. He participated actively in male frontier culture—hunting, exploring, surveying, and fighting. As a member of the militia, he witnessed a number of key events, including the Siege of Boonesborough, the court-martial trial of Daniel Boone, and the signing of the Treaty of Greenville.

Setting

Trabue’s monologue is set in Limestone, Kentucky (now Maysville), in the late 1790s. The small, river community is the location of one of the best landings on the Ohio River. Thousands of settlers to Kentucky have come to the “Western Country” through this river gateway. With the signing of the Treaty of Greenville in 1796, river traffic is now safe from Indian attacks.

Character

Trabue is a typical frontiersman. In the course of his life, he explores, surveys, farms, and serves in the militia. He values—and possesses—the qualities male settlers believed in, from good marksmanship to courage under fire. Like many of his contemporaries, he views the Indians as military opponents more than as savages. At this point in his life, he is reflective about his experiences during an era he knows will go down in history.

Plot

Trabue’s monologue is structured as a series of stories about encounters with Indians. These include his first experience when coming into Kentucky, a dramatic retelling of attacks on Boonesborough and Logan’s Fort, and a poignant account of a father’s reunion with sons previously kidnapped by the Indians. He ends with a thoughtful conversation between himself and an Indian at the signing of the Treaty of Greenville.

Themes

- Gender roles on the frontier
- Complexity of relations between Indians and whites

IN THE MUSEUM

The time of the performance will be posted in the exhibit area. The actor will arrive and begin with a formal introduction. You can help your students make the most of the performance by

- Briefing them ahead of time about what they are going to see;
- Seating them cross-legged on the floor to watch the performance and encouraging good audience etiquette during the monologue; and
- Leading the group in asking questions after the performance.

We rely on teachers and chaperones to make sure students behave well during performances, and we reserve the right to ask disruptive students or classes to leave.

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

- Show respect for the performers and other museum guests by not talking.
- Do not use recording devices, cameras, or laser-pointers during the performance.
- Do not touch or talk with performers unless instructed or encouraged to do so.

